

**Students**

**Attendance**

The State Board of Education definitions establish two levels of criteria for an absence to be considered an excused absence (see table below).

Level	Total # of Days Absent*	Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to be Considered Excused	Documentation Required Within Ten days
1	One through nine	Any reason that the student’s parent or guardian approves.	Parent or Guardian note only.
2	Ten and above	Student illness ( <i>Note: to be deemed excused, an appropriately licensed medical professional must verify all student illness absences, regardless of the absence’s length.</i> )  Student’s observance of a religious holiday  Student mental health day (2)  Death in the student’s family or other emergency beyond the control of the student’s family  Mandated court appearances (additional documentation required)  The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (parental documentation is not required for this reason)	Parent or Guardian note and in some cases additional documentation (see details below of specific reason).

*\*Note: The total number of days absent includes both excused and unexcused absences.*

It is important to note that while the first nine absences in a school year can be deemed excused for any reason the parent or guardian provides, the tenth and each subsequent absence establish a more stringent and specific set of reasons for the absence to qualify as excused.

Included in the excused absences are two (2) student mental health days taken during the school year. Such absence is to permit the student to attend to his/her emotional and psychological well-being in lieu of attending school. For purposes of school year limitation such absence shall be identified as a "mental health wellness day." A student cannot take these mental health days during consecutive school days. A student's engagement in remote classes, remote meetings, activities on time-logged electronic systems, and completion and submission of assignments if

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such engagement accounts for not less than one-half of the school day during remote learning is excluded from the definitions of "excused absence" and "unexcused absence."

Responsibility for completion of missed classwork lies with the student, not the teacher.

In cases where a student’s extended absence crosses levels, the rules should be applied as if there were two separate absences: one under Level 1 and the other under Level 2. For example, if a student is absent for five days on a family vacation and those absences represent numbers seven through eleven, absences seven, eight, and nine would fall under Level 1 rules and can be accepted as excused; absences ten and eleven would fall under Level 2 rules and would not be considered excused.

ARSD communicates the different levels of criteria to parents and provides absence information, so parents can track their child’s excused and unexcused absences. ARSD informs parents when their child has reached his or her sixth and ninth absences and reminds them of the stricter rules that apply to absence number ten and above.

**Documentation**

Parent or guardian notes and other documentation are central to determining whether a student’s absence is excused or unexcused. While a note from a parent or guardian will likely be the most common form of documentation, other methods of reporting a student’s absence are acceptable. For example, a parent or guardian can report the student’s absence in person to an authorized school official, such as an attendance clerk. The table below details the different types of acceptable absence documentation and the required elements for each type:

<b>Parent or Guardian Note</b>	<b>In-Person Explanation from Parent or Guardian to an Authorized School Staff Member</b>	<b>School Nurse Evaluation (either in person or telephone consultation)</b>
Date of absence	Dates of absence	Dates of absence
Reason for absence	Reason for absence parent or guardian reports	Reason for absence
Signature of parent or guardian	Name of parent or guardian reporting the absence	Date and location of the consultation
	Date and location of the report by the parent or guardian	Type of consultation (i.e., did they see the student themselves or speak to parent about the student?)
	Signature of staff member receiving report	Signature of school nurse

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School staff receive or generate documentation for each incidence of absence. An incidence of absence is a set of consecutive school days absent. If a student is out three consecutive days, that is one incidence of absence; therefore, only one note is needed. If the student is out three days but attended school one day between days two and three, the student has two incidences of absence and needs two notes. ARSD accepts notes covering a series of absences, only if the absences share a common cause.

Certain types of absences in Level 2 require additional documentation or verification. Absences due to student illnesses and mandated court appearances require this additional information, once the student has accrued more than nine absences (entered Level 2). For students in Level 1 these additional requirements do not apply. For absences due to student illness Level 2 students must either provide a signed note from a medical professional who has evaluated the student confirming the absence and giving an expected return date or have his or her school nurse verify the student's absence with the medical professional treating the student. The medical professional who is treating the student can be the school nurse at the student's school.

Mandated court appearances also require additional documentation. Students missing school to make mandated court appearances must provide documentation such as:

- a police summons
- a notice to appear
- a subpoena
- a signed note from a court official

### **Accommodations for Parents**

With Connecticut's diverse student population most, if not all, schools will likely encounter a student whose parent or guardian is not proficient in writing in English. These parents may or may not be proficient in writing in another language. Schools should make efforts to help these parents report their child's absences. For parents who are proficient in a language other than English ARSD accepts absence notes in the parents' proficient language. For parents who are not proficient in writing in any language ARSD verbally informs them of the attendance requirements and that they may report a student's absence in person at the school.

### **Families without Health Insurance**

Families who lack health insurance and/or those with limited means may find it challenging to meet the Level 2 requirement to obtain a note from a licensed medical professional for absences due to illness. In these cases school nurses can evaluate the ill student either in person or over the telephone and, where appropriate, provide the required documentation for

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the excused absence.

School nurses can further assist schools and families by:

- assisting parents with accessing publicly supported health insurance for those children who are uninsured
- gaining permission from parents to communicate with health care providers regarding students' health status
- providing schools with a perspective that validates why students with confirmed diagnoses may be frequently absent from school due to illnesses or for therapies essential to maintaining their health

### **Excused Absences for Children of Service Members**

An enrolled student, age five to eighteen inclusive, whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the armed forces as defined in section 27-103 and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted ten days of excused absences in any school year and, at the discretion of the Board of Education, additional excused absences to visit such child's parent or legal guardian with respect to such leave or deployment of the parent or legal guardian. In the case of such excused absences, such child and parent or legal guardian shall be responsible for obtaining assignments from the student's teacher prior to any period of excused absence and for ensuring that such assignments are completed by such child prior to his or her return to school from such period of excused absence.

### **Exceptions to the Documentation Requirement**

Two types of absences do not require documentation:

1. Absences that result from a student not receiving transportation from one school district to attend school in another district must be deemed as an excused absence. For example:
  - a. One district provides transportation for students of its town or region to attend schools run by another district and the district providing the transportation shuts down due to inclement weather or other emergency, but the district that the student attends stays open.
  - b. In this situation the student would be absent but would not need a parental note to that effect; such absence would be deemed excused.
2. Absences that are the result of disciplinary actions taken by ARSD. These disciplinary absences are neither excused nor unexcused.

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### **Emergencies**

One of the acceptable reasons for a Level 2 student to be absent is a death in the family or other emergency beyond the control of the family. For the purposes of the definition of excused absences emergencies are generally significant events that are outside of the control of the student's family. They are normally short absences consisting of a few days at most.

Examples of emergencies include:

- family member who is very ill and close to dying
- student's home is lost to fire or eviction
- family's home is being quarantined
- natural disaster
- a student who is a parent and whose child needs to be in the hospital
- a family member's military deployment or return from deployment

Some unexpected absences will not qualify as an emergency. These include:

- staying home to meet the plumber or other tradesman
- routine childcare of a younger child by the student
- opportunity to work an extra shift at after-school job

Extended absences would be considered an emergency only under extreme circumstances. For example, if an order of the community health department quarantined a family's home for an extended period, such quarantine would be an extended emergency.

Absences due to family emergencies do not require additional documentation. A parental note explaining the emergency received within ten school days is sufficient; but it is essential that the note explain the emergency, so school staff can evaluate if the situation was indeed an emergency.

### **Extraordinary Educational Opportunities**

From time to time students encounter an exceptional opportunity for an experience of an educational nature. While these events may not be part of their school work they provide an excellent chance to further their education. Under certain circumstances the days devoted to these opportunities can count as excused absences for Level 2 students.

To qualify as an extraordinary educational opportunity it must meet the following criteria:

- a. The opportunity must be educational in nature. It must have a learning objective related to the student's course work or plan of study. Not all memorable and/or life experiences

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would be considered educational and, therefore, would not be available for this exemption.

- b. It must be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the students.
- c. It must be grade and developmentally appropriate.
- d. The content of the experience must be highly relevant to the student. While some opportunities will be relevant to all students others will contain very specific content that would limit their relevance to a smaller group of students. For example, a trumpet lesson from jazz great, Wynton Marsalis, would be very relevant to students who play trumpet but not to others who do not play trumpet.

Note: Criteria c) and d) above may mean that an exceptional educational opportunity exemption may be approved for one family member but not another attending the same event/opportunity.

Some examples of extraordinary educational opportunities include:

- the opportunity to meet the President of the United States or a foreign head or state
- a behind-the-scenes tour of the Kennedy Space Center

Some examples of activities that do not qualify as extraordinary educational opportunities include:

- family vacations
- going to a concert of a favorite pop star

### Best Practices for Extraordinary Educational Opportunities

It is important that the school, the student, and the student's family all have a common understanding of the opportunity that is being requested and approved.

1. Requests: All requests for approval of exceptional educational opportunities should be submitted in writing; bear the signature of the student and his/her parent/guardian; outline the learning objective of the opportunity and detail how the objective is linked to the students' coursework or plan of study; include additional documentation (where available); and be submitted prior to the opportunity.
2. Approvals: All approvals for opportunities should:
  - a. be in written form
  - b. detail any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of approval
  - c. include the specific days approved for the opportunities\*
  - d. include in the approval the caveat that the administration may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is canceled or the student fails to meet the mutually

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- agreed on requirements of the approval
- e. \*For approved opportunities that occur during longer absences (e.g., during a vacation) limit the number of days that are considered excused to reasonable travel time to and from the opportunity and the days of the opportunity.*
3. Requirement to share: ARSD expects students to share their experience with other students and/or staff when they return. This will benefit the larger school community.
  4. Approval not assured: ARSD informs parents that approvals are awarded on a case-by-case basis, are based on a number of factors, and that opportunities approved for one student may not be approved for another.

### Chronic Absenteeism

The Board, in compliance with statute, requires the establishment of attendance review teams when chronic absenteeism rates in ARSD or at individual schools in ARSD meet the following circumstances:

1. A team for ARSD must be established when ARSD chronic absenteeism rate is 10 percent or higher.
2. A team for the school must be established when the school chronic absenteeism rate is 15 percent or higher.
3. A team for either ARSD or each school must be established when (a) more than one school in ARSD has a school chronic absenteeism rate of 15 percent or higher or (b) ARSD has a District chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher and one or more schools in ARSD have a school chronic absenteeism rate of 15 percent or higher.

### Definitions (Related to Chronic Absenteeism)

**Chronically absent child:** An enrolled student whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at such school during such school year

**Absence:** An excused absence, unexcused absence, or disciplinary absence as those terms are defined by the State Board of Education pursuant to C.G.S. 10-198b

**District chronic absenteeism rate:** The total number of chronically absent children in the previous school year divided by the total number of children under the jurisdiction of the Board for such school year

**School chronic absenteeism rate:** The total number of chronically absent children for a school in the previous school year divided by the total number of children enrolled in such school for such school year

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### Loss of Credit

Students with excessive absences in a high school course may lose credit for that course. The number of absences that may result in a loss of credit for both year-long and semester-long courses will be published annually. Parents/guardians will be notified when a loss of credit has been issued; notification will include the process to appeal the loss of credit.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-184 Duties of parents (as amended by PA 98-243, PA 00-157 and PA 18-15)

10-185 Penalty

10-198a Policies and procedures concerning truants (as amended by P.A.11-136, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes and PA 14-198, An Act Concerning Excused Absences from School for Children of Service Members, and PA 16-147, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee)

10-198b State Board of Education to define "excused absence," "unexcused absence," and "disciplinary absence" (as amended by PA 21-46 Section 19)

10-198d Chronic absenteeism (as amended by PA 17-14 and PA 18-182)

45a-8c Truancy clinic. Administration. Policies and procedures. Report. (as amended by PA 15-25)

10-199 through 10-202 Attendance, truancy - in general

Action taken by State Board of Education on January 2, 2008, to define "attendance."

Action taken by State Board of Education on June 27, 2012, to define "excused" and "unexcused" absences.

PA 17-14 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education



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PA 21-46 An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children